



HOW THE PANDEMIC DESTROYED OUR 'SOCIAL CAPITAL'? A HOLISTIC REVIEW

Mohamed Buheji

International Inspiration Economy Project- Bahrain

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic shackled up our ability to work physically together, to solve complex problems in the field, and form initiatives that make up the new developments of our communities. This paper reviews how our social capital is being threatened, especially in unprecedented times. The research explores what challenges the pandemic and the new normal brought to our social capital, social mobility, social behaviours, while created an appreciation for our spiritual- and social being.

The researcher investigates how our social capital values, and beliefs, besides our attitudes, have been affected by the changes in the social interactions that became more virtual since the outbreak. The implication of the paper carries early notes for mitigation against loss or destruction of social capital, which usually plays a puffer against collective social cognitive impairment. The paper concludes with recommendations and a scope for future framework that could help to bring initiatives that focus on citizens engagement, and optimising multidisciplinary thinking that targets the enhancement of future generations social networks capacity; taking in consideration the rise of aging populations.

Keywords: Social Capital, Social Mobility, Social Network, COVID-19 Pandemic, New Normal.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, economists have acknowledged that physical capital is not the only available and necessary kind of capital. Evidence indicates that human capital, natural capital, cultural capital, and social capital have an important role in human social life.

Social capital (SC) has been relatively recent in theory and research. SC elements are found to have an impact on the quality of relationships, whether it is based on formal and informal groups, Buheji and Ahmed (2018).

Expanding and facilitating the communication networks and social ties promotes access levels between individuals and groups to economic and social resources. These ties and communications in their different forms act as a type of glue so that the elements present in society can connect together and accumulate functions such as social cooperation (Ounagh et al., 2011).

SC must be efficient and effective to ensure the proper outcome of the developmental programs. Depending on the SC conditions relations and ties present among people to each other, and with to organisations or communities around them. The most important role of SC in the process of development is to enhance these ties and act as a catalyst through making better communications and positively supported ties among the individuals living in one place. Fafchamps (2006)

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Reviewing the Non-Financial Capital

Since its inception, inspiration economy, as a concept, was focused on solving socioeconomic problems, through exploiting non-financial capitals and discovering opportunities inside different complex challenges. The most known sustainable capitals are human capital, natural capital, physical capital, and social capital. The human capital is measured by the level of tacit and explicit knowledge, education, human health, skills, and competency, Imandoust (2011) and Dinda (2008). Natural capital is measured by the quality of air, the productivity of the land, the availability of fresh water, biodiversity, material, and energy resources. The physical capital is measured by the available infrastructure, the stability of the working environment, the industrial capacity, and the healthiness of the governance system with the community or the country. While finally, the social capital focuses on the level of social network levels of engagement or involvement, or type of interconnections, level of synergy with the community, the resilience of the culture, heritage, way of life, level of liberty and happiness within the community. Buheji (2016), Buheji (2018a,b).

Collectively-owned SC's are associated with common access to trust, trustworthiness, civic norms, and voluntary activities. These SC's are developed during stability more than instability. However, if utilised during unprecedented times, it might bring more realised benefits. Fafchamps (2006)

2.2. Definition and Importance of Social Capital

Social capital (SC) can be explained as a concept that tries to capture the essence of community life. The concept is based on the idea that communities work well or poorly based on the ways in which people interact. The social dimension of life and how it is lived, besides the social participation are what defines a social network that leads to cooperation and solidarity. This sequence is clearly missing in current virtual social networks, or what is called the social media relations.

Robert Putnam (2000) of the Kennedy School of Government (Harvard University), defines SC as the social networks and the norms of trustworthiness and reciprocity that arise from them. Hence, SC can be seen in who knows whom, the character and the strength of such relations, the levels of trust available, the levels of reciprocity.

Grootaert and van Bestelaer (2002) defined social capital (SC) as any institution, or relationship, or attitudes, or values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development.

Hanifan (1916) was the pioneer in seeing the importance of SC in our life and where he has seen that it is a good measure of the value of the social networks that come from goodwill, fellowship, and different social intercourse.

2.3. How Social Capital Created and Maintained?

SC is a value we gain from social interactions that could lead directly to a more value for other capital. For example, social interaction that could enhance the human capital when we exchange knowledge. This knowledge exchange makes us build, or gain social capital about the type of knowledge specific people have in the community we are engaging with. Dinda (2008)

Generally, the SC become a result of ongoing, repeated interactions that would exploit more known, or hidden resources. Physical capital, natural capital, and human capital can be more exploited through the effective utilisation of social capital.

2.4. Importance of Social Capital in Unprecedented Times

Improved informal socialising and social participation reduce the risk of cognitive decline in the aftermath of international emergencies as the COVID-19 pandemic. Interventions to promote civic participation should be tried to promote cognitive resilience. Building a social cognitive dimension (perceptions of community social cohesion) and a structural dimension (informal socialising and social participation) could help to raise community resilience and avoidance of collective cognitive disability when disasters and national or international emergencies occurs. Hikichi et al. (2017)

SC is very important for the empowerment of the vulnerable, women and youth, especially in these disempowering times, SC help to build their capacity to fight Inequality and raise their capability to be oriented with the alternatives available within their community, Buheji (2019). Buheji (2018b,c) saw that SC could play a role in enhancing entrepreneurial neighbourhoods, as through understanding the socioeconomic of these neighbourhoods or communities, many projects could be initiated with a higher rate of success.

2.5. What pandemic brought to our Social Capital?

2.5.1 Diagnosis of the General SC Challenges as a Result of COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic merely brought new challenges or enhanced existing ones. Many jobs were lost with the length of lockdown, or replacement of requirements of social distancing with automation, New type of relative poverty of specifically the lower middle class became clearer in many countries. Systemic racism, and the persistence of the climate crisis also enhanced further the social breakdown. Buheji and Ahmed (2021).

The current social capital not only weakened the level of intensity of physical communication, but it lacks after 24 months of the pandemic, the resilience to mental health challenges, besides the clarity for its type of social mobility. Buheji (2018a)

2.5.2 Social mobility due to the pandemic

Social mobility refers to the shift in an individual's social status from one status to another. The shift can either be higher, lower, inter-generational, or intra-generational.

The slow speed of social mobility, which is forced by the repeated lockdowns and persistence of the spread of the infection, reduced the SC value, as it depends on these social interactions. This also impacted the SC standard of living.

The slow social mobility made most of the new generation to be limited regarding getting exposed to the different experiences and different types of mobility in different stages of their youth life.

Despite the continuation of some horizontal mobility where people have taken a decision to change their occupation, the overall social standing remains stagnant. However, one could identify much descending vertical mobility where many people in different countries had to accept lower-paid jobs, work part-time, or many small business owners incurred losses and were forced to declare bankruptcy.

The pandemic also caused many people to experience downward mobility where they had to accept a low position in the company and had to live stressful status just to stay in business. As the pandemic hits mainly the middle and the low class of the society, many people had to adapt to the new normal environment, where different living standards are applied. This created a further negative impact on society values, and the probabilities for equal opportunity in employment. Buheji (2020b).

2.5.3 Influence of the Pandemic on Young Generation SC

SC plays an important role in improving generation connections and eliminating generations gaps. The pandemic limited the flow, or the possibility of upward inter-generational or intra-generational mobility. Few new generations now have the chance to have a better social position compared to previous generations. Such limitation of opportunities forced the new generation to adopt a new way of living and thinking. The intra-generational mobility, limited the lifespan changes of position threshold. The slow economy, the instability of the market, the socioeconomic and socio-political tensions caused by the pandemic spillovers constrained the movement of youth from one position in the society to another.

2.5.4 Influence of Social Distancing on SC Behaviors

Many people were forced during the last 24 months of this fierce pandemic to leave their familiar surroundings. Many front-liners, for example, were forced to avoid living with their family as a means of protecting them from cross-infection possibilities. Many gigs entrepreneurs who were the character of the pre-pandemic decade were forced to be isolated from common coffee shops and free spaces they used to do their work or form deals with suppliers.

The restrictions that came with long or repeated lockdowns forced many people to change their way of thinking, and this influenced their mindset and eventually their behaviour. The pandemic spillovers forced many of the SC to adapt to the new environment, and adopt different behaviours in the new normal requirements. Buheji (2020b)

2.5.5 Pandemic Spillover on Our Spiritual- and Social-beings

The length of the COVID-19 pandemic made us appreciate more the gift of being both spiritual- and social beings. The physical and the social distancing awakened in us the importance of practising more social life, and to appreciate family or friends moments. Now we know what we mean to be more of spiritual- or social-beings than just human beings. Now, more than ever, the generations appreciate the importance of real formal and informal SC development. Even nations, communities and organisations now value the impact the SC reserve in dealing with the similar coming crisis.

This spillover of the threats of the pandemic was also a wake-up call for youth generations whose minds have been dominated by the speed of hi-tech and social media developments leaving behind many basic human-being realised needs. The crisis wakened us on appreciating the value of losing physical contact due to fear of cross-contamination. The persistence of the pandemic also moved many of the SC to appreciate the presence of the loved ones, especially the elderly parents.

2.6. The Rise of Virtual- on behalf of Physical-Social Capital

The pandemic made many people wake up for the importance of living physically with their families, or friends. They realised now more what we call ‘physical is relevant to mental’. The lockdown showed the importance of the communication of social species; rather than social media and apps, virtual friends became more in demand.

The rise of the virtual SC on behalf of the physical SC made youth appreciate what dialogues and communication models they lost by choice before they lost it by the pandemic. However, the consequences and the speed of the new normal showed how fragile SC virtual relations are and how important the physical ones.

3. MITIGATION OF THE SC DESTRUCTION

3.1. Signs of Destruction of SC

Unfortunately, SC can always be destroyed much faster than it can be created. During the pandemic, many incidences encouraged this destruction, such as failing to meet trust perceptions, or maintaining a community’s commitment. On the other misinterpretation or the negative interpretation due to the different pandemic spillovers, reduced the intensity of the SC relations. Behaviour not only became unpredictable, but even not expected at all. Having strange visitors became a challenge to the households, as the worries of cross-infection escalate with more COVID-19 cases reported with every new pandemic wave.

After the pandemic, selfish acts became the norm, whether on the level of individuals, or organisations, or communities, or even countries. The young generations seeing repeated acts of scarcity based social relations with increase in polarisation.

3.1. Closing the SC Gap through raising ‘Social’ Curiosity

In order to close the gap, more youth need to be encouraged to participate in addressing socioeconomic tasks. Once youth get engaged with new normal challenges in solving socioeconomic problems effectively. By enabling young adults into the community socioeconomic problem, we improve their SC while recalibrating their moral values in maintaining their social relationships. Buheji (2018a), Buheji (2020a)

Social curiosity is about being involved with social issues and being able to connect effectively with other SC through different social interactions opportunities. Through social curiosity, we could discover different opportunities ingrained within the community. Many of the social curiosity was the cause of many changes in SC development. When the SC are inspired by a greater purpose in life, or new ideas, or projects that come as a result of this social curiosity, we actually help their thoughts and mind to transcend beyond the limitations of the pandemic or its spillovers. Buheji (2020a)

3.2. Reviewing the Role of Social Capital in New Normal

In the new normal, we can’t build new pioneering projects without enhancing the curiosity currency which is highly dependent on how much we utilise and link all the capitals, including the SC. The impact of new normal on socioeconomic challenges specifically requires behavioural interventions that tackle complex situations. Behavioural interventions will be only one tool towards creating social change. However, it is a very effective tool if it is gained by ‘learning by doing’, or by ‘learning by exploring’, this what builds the multidisciplinary solutions that lead to the ‘new normal’. Buheji (2020a)

Wong and Kohler (2020) called for adopting a comprehensive for fostering SC role towards effective response and recovery towards pandemic like situations.

Virtual community building, building solidarity and trust between high-risk, low-risk groups, first-line professionals and decision-makers, help to offer a powerful frame of reference that mitigate the challenges in any community. Buheji and Sisk (2020c)

3.3. Rebuilding the SC Networks

The main SC networks, which are based on the thickness of trust, needs to be redefined and rebuilt so that it gives priority again to family and friends, not to virtual relationships. Putnam (2000) sees SC as the behaviour of social networks and relationships, characterised by the qualitative presence of enhanced trust and reciprocity. In order to rebuild this trust-based network, we need to re-evaluate the way it is working, i.e., whether this network has repeated exposure and shared interest. And whether there is transparency and reliability in this relation. Also, the way the communication model and level of commitment would play a role. Consistency in behaviour among the SC is also part of the level of trust.

In order to support this rebuilding of the SC network, specifically among the young generation, we need to see their formal and informal ties, i.e., with entities, or with civil entities, or sports clubs, or neighbourhood coops. The new designed network can be horizontally driven, i.e., it works based on bridging ties across different races, age, gender, class, ethnicity and religion. The final type of SC would be based on bonding relations which depends on ties with neighbours, or associations, or fraternity clubs.

3.4. Creating New Changes in the Intensity of SC Relations

SC relations is also constrained by their intensity. Some SC have strong intensity; others would have a weak one. The SC relations is strong when it is available between those who share an intimate or common interest, or appreciate the foresighted future or the collective risks.

The intensity of the relation can be intermittent for areas where others can fill on our behalf, and need to be strong, where we should be engaged closely and where others can't fill in our place.

Svendsen and Svendsen (2005) warned about the 'forgotten' production factor of social capital, which is crucial for the economic cycle and considered to be a supplement for the traditional factors of production such as physical, financial and human capital. Svendsen and Svendsen seen then SC can bridge the gap between factors that determine important socioeconomic movements such as entrepreneurship, and co-operative movements.

3.5. Importance of SC to post-pandemic development

Roslan et al. (2010) argued that neglecting SC may lead to failure of achieving the full potentials of development. While we move again to a scarcity world where people, communities and countries are becoming more worried about the constraints of life and livelihood, the financial, natural and physical capitals are becoming the focus of most decision-makers after coming out of lockdown. Even increasing the human capital as a tool for achieving development objectives is becoming secondary in priority compared to the other three capitals. Hence, social capital is becoming more in the shadow, even though it plays a role in improving the quality of life. Karimzadeh and Karimzadeh (2013)

Investment in social capital is expected not only to raise the standard of living but also to improve the quality of life. Babaei et al., (2011) found there is a significant relationship between social capital and the Human Development Index (HDI).

Yaghoubzadeh (2011) confirmed that there is a correlation between economic development and social capital. Flores and Rello (2003) social capital are a key resource in the success of the projects of the poor groups.

Johannes (2009) membership in associations that raise the probability of SC was found to be positively correlated with household per capita expenditure (i.e., poverty reduction).

This analysis suggested that policymakers interested in improving the living conditions of households may be advised to consider promoting social capital as one relevant ingredient to achieve the millennium development goals of reducing poverty.

Roslan et al., (2010) conducted research about the importance of social capital in poverty alleviation and found it is highly related also to the age and gender of the head of the household, as well as the size of the household.

Fukuyama (2010) social capital interacts with other factors in international development, and contribute to economic growth and poverty alleviation in the future. Andriani (2010) showed that social capital is positively correlated to higher levels of living standard in Italy. While, Bjornskov (2003) seen that the relationship between social capital and life satisfaction helps economic growth, which in turn, may create optimism for the future.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

4.1. The Use of Social Capital for Post-Pandemic Development

This paper focuses on social capital and how it can be reproduced after a pandemic and into the new normal. The new normal carries lots of social system problems that are ill-formulated and confusing, but this confusion is what going to cause the mind to search for opportunities that can't be seen otherwise. This challenge would also bring more engagement from people of conflicting values. This brings in better "solutions" that harness the community's capacities, and social response. Buheji and Sisk (2020c)

The economic instability caused by the pandemic and the rise of repeated environmental crises were making its pressures on the SC and made many people accept to work in poor working conditions, or unfair human rights situations. The researcher calls here for a comprehensive, holistic SC assessment in all the organisations and if possible communities to see what type of repairs are needed for both the social and sociological aspects of life in the aftermath of the pandemic.

4.2. Reconstruction of SC through Using Neuroscience

The COVID-19 crisis would give rise to the importance of social neuroscience is an interdisciplinary concept that could be devoted to understanding how our bodies would be more fit to face the coming type of complex crisis through re-strengthened social ties within our surroundings. Social neuroscience is another opportunity that we need to exploit to enhance our biological defence system and change the self-selected isolation behaviour, which has accelerated with the advent of the pandemic and the technological breakthroughs.

he future of human beings and their quality of life depends on a better understanding of their SC through future foresight driven studies that uses methodologies of neuroscience that would help to strengthen social capital tolerance.

4.3. Reconstruction of SC through Optimising Multidisciplinary Thinking

In order to mitigate the loss and destruction of SC during the pandemic, we need to develop interdisciplinary approaches, combining both the tools of social and neuroscience, with economics, and anthropological sciences. A creative multidisciplinary initiative would help to lubricate the mechanisms of human bonding and facilitate more creative, inclusive forms of SC.

Multidisciplinary approaches should not only help to build proper social motives that heal the destructed SC, but also bring inspiring models *that* alleviate the domination of the materialistic mindset of the post-pandemic generation and raise the importance of SC role in any coming future solutions.

4.4. Maintaining Social Capital with Aging Population

As the world is moving towards a more aging economy, the preservation of cognitive function in older individuals would depend on the type and depth of initiatives taken to maintain the social connections in the community. To improve aging population resilience towards unprecedented future emergencies and protect their collective mental health, governments and communities should work on releasing schemes or programs that help to preserve the physical communities and neighborhoods social connections as a crucial ingredient for future wellbeing.

4.5. Final Words for Future Studies

Despite the limitations of not being able to quantify the amount of SC destroyed, this research calls for serious future foresight of SC situations due to both unprecedented crises or due to other factors that threaten real community engagement. Future studies should focus on the rehabilitation or re-design of social relations that could be reconstructed in the community that would help maintain the quality of life and make SC a source for socioeconomic development. Trusting each other, working on mutual interests, and neighbourhood community attachment can be a good start for further future studies. Maintaining individual social capital that supports their cognitive functioning, and mitigates any threat to mental health wellness, should be part of the quality of life efforts of any country and/or community; to avoid further destruction of the essence of our social life.

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